

Democrats Seek to Repair, Renovate, and Renew America=s Public Schools

Need for School Modernization

Democrats know that, in order for students to learn and compete in the global economy, America=s schools must be well-equipped and up-to-date and they must be able to accommodate smaller class sizes. Federal aid is vital needed to help overwhelmed states and local school districts deal with the enormous backlog in school modernization needs.

- ! In 1995, the General Accounting Office documented that our neighborhood schools need \$112 billion to repair or upgrade dangerous or substandard facilities. One-third of all public schools -- about 25,000 schools, need extensive repair or replacement. Further, according to the GAO, 60% of schools have at least one major building feature in disrepair.
- ! The average public school in America is 42 years old, and school buildings begin to deteriorate after 40 years according to the National Center for Education Statistics.
- ! A record 53.2 million children are enrolled in elementary and secondary schools and that number will grow to 54.2 million by 2009. To accommodate the rising enrollments and to relieve overcrowding, it is estimated that we will need 2,400 new public schools by 2003 according to the National Center for Education Statistics.

Democrats Propose to Take Action

- ! This week, Democrats introduced a new initiative (H.R. 3705; S. 2124) to provide \$1.3 billion in loans and grants to high-poverty school districts unable to afford urgent, essential school repairs. Most of this new funding would subsidize seven-year no-interest loans to leverage nearly \$6.7 billion for roughly 8,300 new school renovation projects.
- ! This is on top of the larger longer term proposal that Democrats have been pushing for the past three years. Specifically, House Democrats are working to pass H.R. 1660, an initiative providing federal tax credits to pay interest on \$25 billion in bonds to build and modernize public schools. This initiative would have a dramatic impact on helping school districts and states meet their unmet construction and modernization needs. It is estimated that these federal tax credits would help local districts build or modernize approximately 6,000 schools across the country. This initiative would provide significant help to local school districts in meeting their needs both to build new classrooms to reduce overcrowding and to renovate and modernize their existing facilities.